



Religious institutions and the politics of access to basic services in displacement contexts

bureaucratising assistance or gifts of grace?

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**RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND THE POLITICS OF ACCESS
TO BASIC SERVICES IN DISPLACEMENT CONTEXTS:**

- BUREAUCRATISING ASSISTANCE OR GIFTS OF GRACE?

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Abstract:

This paper provides a study of religious institutions as service providers in contexts of crises and displacement. Religious institutions, as well as other non-state institutions, provide access to a vast range of resources and services (such as food, housing, clothes, counseling, money, and access to networks). In contexts of displacement access to basic services is formally regulated by one's status (e.g. as refugee or national citizen) and by physical location (e.g. in settlements/camps or urban areas). The paper discusses what role religious institutions play when access to services provided by the state or the international humanitarian system is limited or non-existent and what kind of relations of exchange that is at stake. Empirically the project deals with Congolese churches in Kampala, Uganda of which many pastors and members have refugee status.

The paper analyses the range and categories of services provided by churches and the categorization of people gaining access to these resources. The furthermore paper discusses what forms of recognition engaging in these more material relations of exchange entail, as well as the forms of authority that are established.

INTRODUCTION

Debates on the provision and regulation of social services in contexts of political and economic crises have drawn our attention to the broad spectrum of actors and institutions that co-produce, co-exist, substitute, supplement or challenge one another when providing services (Blundo 2006, Blundo and Le Meur 2009, Goodfellow and Lindemann 2013, Joshi and Moore 2004, Raeymaekers *et al* 2008). At the same time, and within the last decade or so, the literature on refugees and forced migrants accentuates the fact that many refugees live outside official camps and settlements and instead settle in cities where they depend on informal institutions and social networks to make a living (Russell 2011, Sommers 2001). This prompts the question of understanding how these institutions work, how they govern access to their services and according to what norms and criteria. Furthermore, it induces us to ask in what ways these forms of institutions meet other institutions, such as the state, international agencies and NGOs, and what the implications are of this in terms of creating new forms authority, processes of recognition and political subjectification (Fassin 2008, Fraser 2000).

This paper¹ focuses in particular at religious institutions as service providers in contexts of crises and displacement. Religious institutions provide access to a vast range of resources and services (such as food, housing, clothes, counselling, money, and access to networks, as well as spiritual services such as prayers and deliverance). In contexts of displacement access to basic services and humanitarian assistance is formally regulated by one's status (e.g. as asylum seeker, refugee or national citizen) and by physical location (e.g. in settlements/camps or urban areas). The paper discusses what role religious institutions play when access to services provided by the state or the international humanitarian system is limited or non-existent and

¹ This paper is part of a postdoctoral financed by the Danish Council of Independent Research | Social Sciences. It is based on fieldwork carried out in Kampala, Uganda in January-March 2012 and in January 2013. I conducted a little more than 80 interviews with Congolese pastors, church members, who had for the most part come to Uganda because of the unrest in DRC. I also interviewed people from NGOs working with urban refugees and refugee associations. I concentrated most of my time on two Congolese congregations; one located in the Katwe area on Kampala and the other in the Nsambya area of Kampala. Both areas can be characterised as containing slum dwellings where many refugees live in small houses. Katwe is, however, also known as being a thriving district with a high number of local enterprises. Due to the high mobility of both churches and people I also followed some people who had been moving to other areas of the city and/or had changed church. The usual disclaimers apply.

what kind of relations of exchange that is at stake. It builds on the premise that by providing both material and spiritual services, religious institutions and their leaders build up positions of authority that draw on several sources of power and this is what distinguishes them from other non-state institutions. This has implications for their understanding of what services are in the first place and how access is regulated.

Empirically the paper focuses on Congolese churches in Kampala, Uganda of which many pastors and members have refugee status², but some are also students, business people etc. There is a growing community of Congolese churches in Kampala. Most are registered with the Congolese Christian Community, which is an umbrella association of these churches. According to the current president there are around 50 member churches. The churches are of a Pentecostal/charismatic orientation and have been established within the last decade or so by Congolese people who had fled the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (henceforth DRC). When new refugees or asylum seekers come to Kampala they ask for a Congolese pastor or church and this is often their first point of contact. At the same time they register with the police and the Office of the Prime Minister (henceforth OPM). Some are then assisted directly by the church (e.g. by being allocated a place in church to sleep) and also by church members (e.g. by offering food, clothes etc.). So the churches function both as service providers themselves, but also as mediators of services either from fellow church members or the more official system (UNHCR and NGOs). In relation to the latter the churches offer guidance on how to approach the system and at times also act as entry points to the system as some church leaders act as community leaders and represent the Congolese community vis-à-vis for instance the UNHCR.

The churches therefore take part in two different institutional landscapes with different ideological framings. On the one hand they are part of the religious landscape in Kampala (and part of wider religious networks with links to DRC and

² The term refugee is problematic to use for several reasons. First, it is a juridical categorisation that refers to an international convention and hence to people's formal status in a country that is not their country of origin. Second, it reflects a form of politics labelling in which objects of policy concern are created and through which domination is exercised (Zetter 1991, 2007). However, not all Congolese church leaders or members I talked to were refugees; some had come as pastors, as students or as business men.

places where refugees are resettled to, e.g. Canada), and on the other hand they are part of and interacting with a more policy-oriented institutional landscape that assist, control, label, and manage refugees; namely that of humanitarian organisations, NGOs and the state. These institutions either have a formal responsibility and/or have more altruistic or ideological motivations for their involvement.

The paper argues that religious institutions as service providers relate to a double normative framework. On the one hand they justify and legitimate their actions of helping others through religious idioms. On the other hand, in their practices they also seek to set up institutional practices that reflect and adapt the practices of humanitarian organisations and NGOs, e.g. to set up rules, formalise assistance, bureaucratised their practices. In this way, 'refugee' churches navigate two registers of norms and practices and relate to their members in both ways. This has implications for how relationships between church leaders and church members are established, but also for how church leaders seek to build up their legitimacy. It furthermore affects the link between these institutions and other more formal institutions. At the more overall level the paper discusses religious institutions as alternative arenas of governance, and the processes of recognition. But also the dynamics of political subjectification (Fassin 2008) in the sense that the labels and categories that these people are put into, is both a form of domination, but also becomes part of one's self-identification (Zetter 1991, 2007).

In this paper I focus in particular on the role of religious institutions and their role as service providers in a field that is both informed by religious oriented norms and more bureaucratised and policy oriented norms. Related to this, the paper also discusses how help or assistance is perceived within these institutions, and it is argued, this has implications for how access to assistance is regulated. Furthermore, I analyse the social relationships and the relations of exchange that are established, both between church leaders and pastors, and to a more limited extent also between the religious institutions and other actors in the wider institutional landscape in the urban setting of Kampala.

The paper starts by setting the context of Congolese churches in Kampala, Uganda. The paper then maps out the variety of services these churches provide. The paper then discusses the norms and criteria that regulate access to services. The paper argues that (at least) two different sets of norms are drawn upon: 1) religious (Christian) ideas of being needy/worthy, ideas of the 'pure gift' as well as ideas around gifts of grace and gratitude; and 2) ideas that reflect a more bureaucratized understanding of rights and entitlements related to the status of being a refugee that the churches seem to adopt from other institutions.

CRISES AND DISPLACEMENT

Since the overthrow of President Mobutu in 1996, the DRC has witnessed conflicts and mass displacement of people. Many Congolese have come to Uganda and other neighbouring countries to seek refuge. More recently, post-election violence (December 2011) and the continuing conflicts in the Kivus have resulted in a growing number of Congolese crossing the border to Uganda. In its 2013 country operations profile for Uganda, the UNHCR estimated that approximately 190,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers are in Uganda, of which 120,000 are from the DRC. In addition, 48,000 of the 190,000 refugees are considered to live in urban areas mainly in Kampala (UNHCR, 2013). The latest influx of Congolese refugees started in April 2012, with the creation in Eastern Congo of the rebel movement M23.

The official policy of the government of Uganda³ has until recently been that all refugees should reside in refugee settlements (Bernstein 2005: 7; Lammers 2006). These settlements are located in rural areas, mainly in the north-western and western parts of the country. Refugees are allocated plots of land for agricultural activities, and the long-term aim is that they should become self-reliant. This policy reflected the view that refugees should be in the country only on a temporary basis and that they should be controlled and surveyed. However, it has been unofficially accepted that refugees live outside settlements if they are self-sufficient and can document this (Bernstein 2005), although they would have no rights to receiving assistance (Russell 2011: 295). With the passing of the Uganda Refugees

³ Based on the Control of Alien Refugees Act from 1960.

Act by parliament in 2006, the legal rights of refugees to move, live and work outside settlements were acknowledged. Still, the provision of assistance has largely been restricted to those living in settlements (World Refugee Survey 2009).

A growing number of refugees are settling in Kampala and other urban areas (Omata 2012). Most refugees with whom I spoke had come directly to Kampala without passing through a camp. People come to Kampala for the better livelihood opportunities and better access to health and educational services. In addition, the refugee settlements are located close to the border with the DRC, which poses a security risk. For example, refugees living in settlements have been recruited to rebel groups operating in Rwanda and the DRC (Bernstein 2005; Murison 2002). Upon arrival in Kampala, they ask for the Congolese community or a Congolese church; many are referred to the Congolese churches that are known for helping refugees. Most refugees rent small rooms in the slum areas of Kampala (e.g., Katwe, Kisenyi, and Nsambya) if they can afford it. Some live in the streets or sleep at the premises of Old Kampala Police Station, where refugees register (Lammers 2006). Many refugees also find shelter in churches or in pastors' homes.

Urban refugees do not have access to assistance (food, shelter) and have to be self-reliant, which in practical terms mean that they depend on social networks, family, friends and help from churches and small urban refugee associations. Urban refugees do in principle have access to the same basic social services as Ugandan citizens (education and health services), but due to a number of barriers (language, discrimination, lack of economic resources to pay fees, etc.) these services are often not accessible. Some assistance is provided by the UNHCR and a number of NGOs, like medicine, counselling for rape victims, micro-credit loans and workshops on refugees' rights. However, it was unclear to many refugees who are entitled to this assistance.

The difficulties refugees have making a living reflect the deteriorating living conditions in general in Kampala. Goodfellow (2010) argues that Kampala is in a situation of profound institutional crises (caused by a conflict between the national government and the city council, which is held by the opposition party), as reflected in the government's inability to address the growing problems of unemployment, inadequate housing, and conflicts over land. This has resulted in demonstrations in 2009 and again in spring 2011 (the walk-to-

work campaigns). However, certain obstacles are specific to the situation of refugees and non-citizens. Language and the translation of documents like diplomas pose a barrier to finding a job in the formal sector. In Kampala, Luganda and English are spoken by most, whereas Congolese mainly speak Lingala, Swahili and/or French. The majority of the refugees hope to be resettled by the UNHCR and move to a Western country. Therefore some hesitate to invest in a new life in Kampala and also to receive micro-credit loans as they understand their participation as a symbol of being tied to that specific physical place.

FORMS OF ASSISTANCE

Alice came to Kampala in late December 2012. She came with one of her children, two cousins and her husband from Goma in the North Kivu province. She left her second child in Goma with a friend. They crossed the border to Uganda at Bunagana after having spent some days in the mountains and went directly to Kampala. Here they went first to register with the police and the OPM. They were told to come back after two weeks when they would get the asylum seeker status. Alice explained that she had been living a good life in Goma, and therefore would not want to go to a camp. The next thing they did was to look for a church in Kampala and they found a Ugandan church in Katwe. The head pastor was travelling and they could not get help so they were taken to a Congolese church a bit further down the road. Here they were welcomed by the head pastor, who invited them to stay in church as they were Congolese brothers. They sleep in the church on small mattresses and get food from the pastor and some church members. During the day they gather their belongings in a corner of the church and sit outside. Alice recounted her story and background to the pastor. She is a film-maker and singer and the pastor told her that she was free to show her talent in church.⁴

The case of Alice and her family is a common story of how Congolese get assistance from the religious communities when arriving in Kampala. What is interesting in her way of telling how they were received is that they are both received as people in need

⁴ Fieldnotes 4 January 2013.

of help, but also as people who have certain talents to perform in church and thereby create relations of exchange. This is one of the differences with regard to other institutional platforms where refugees seek and receive assistance. This will be discussed further in a later section of the paper.

Broadly speaking the material assistance provided by churches can be divided into two overall categories: 1) immediate assistance (food, medicine, shelter) and 2) assistance that is more investment oriented (e.g. for business activities, education, renting a house, family support).

In term of immediate assistance churches first and foremost provide shelter. People would stay in church or in other church members' houses. Some people stay in the church for some months and then move on to small rented rooms or houses. Other with less economic means stay in the churches for up to two years. One of the churches I visited was known to be a 'refugee church'. They had invested in mattresses, sheet, and cooking utensils. They had had up to six families living in the church. Later on, however, the church had moved to another premise and was no more capable of hosting people in the church. Newcomers would now be invited to stay with other church members, or the pastors would share their homes. One pastor had changed house three times within a year to make room for newly arrived refugees. Sometimes a house would be shared by putting up a curtain in the middle of the room. But some would also be referred to the camps if there were no other possibilities, as was the case with to teenage sisters who upon arrival in Kampala contacted a pastor, but there were no spaces available. In some cases the pastors would help with paying the first months' rent of a house.

The churches and pastors would also provide people with a small amount of money to get started with some petty trading. Many churches also offer English courses to their members and others who can pay the small fee.

The churches also provide an institutional space where people can assist each other (through collective collections of money, food, accommodation with fellow church members etc.). This could either happen in smaller groups (e.g. women's department) or the pastors could announce if someone had a special need and organise a collection.

The church would organise home visits in case of birth and collect money for buying sugar, soap and food for the family. In the case of death the churches helped to either repatriate the body to the DRC or with burial in Uganda. At the individual level some church members were assisted directly by a pastor (e.g. helping with paying rent, or finding a sponsor to pay for children's education) if there was a close connection.

The churches and pastors also act as mediators to the official system. Some pastors were representing the Congolese community in the meetings of the UNHCR and in this way served as direct entry points to those taking decisions. More concretely, pastors would guide people on how to fill in their forms (which has to be done in English), on where to go, who to talk to and how to present their case. This kind of service is also to some degree provided by an NGO (Refugee Law Project) that offers counselling by lawyers as well as socio-psychological counselling. However, these services are much less accessible as they require having an appointment and a file with the organisation. Often refugees wait in line for long hours in the front of the office. In this way the services rendered by the churches can be seen as being more accessible, less bureaucratised and less formalised.

However, there was at the same time attempts made by the churches to formalise and bureaucratised the services they were offering. One of the churches I studied had some years back tried to set up a system where they would formalise and expand the help they could provide by creating an NGO. The process was initiated by the founding pastor of the church who had since left for Canada. In the process they created a system of file making for each refugee. Each refugee had to fill in personal information, when they had become born-again, the name of their responsible pastor, when they had entered Uganda, their refugee file number as well as the name of other churches they had frequented in Uganda. They also had to attach a photo. The aim was to create a project where the church would be able to assist church members in a more systematised way, e.g. with vocational training, starting of businesses etc. At that time the church had around 300 members. But when the pastor left the church and the project did not receive any funding, people started leaving the church and rumours started to circulate that the church did not keep its promises and the church

was hosting refugees involved in fraud. This, as well as the church moving premises three times within a year, caused many to leave the church. Last year the church had around 30 regular members. One pastor explained that when people see that the church is not providing material help they go and look for somewhere else. She said:

“Some could not stand the challenges. To be in S. [church] you must have a heart, which is saved, truly saved. We pass through many situations. If you are not called by God, you will be left on the way. That is the testimony. It is the only way I can explain it. I cannot judge them. I can only say to remain here; you have to have a good heart. A heart to serve the Lord”⁵

She uses a religious language to make intelligible that people had left the church and that the church had not delivered the expected services. In this way she also distinguishes between different ways of rendering services: A more bureaucratised form that entails registration, filing, documentation, and where there are more well defined expectations of what to receive, and then a more informal ad-hoc form of rendering services, that is understood in a religious language and in a way that somehow puts the attention back to the relation between the individual church member and God and hence also a different layer of the reciprocal relations of exchange; people are in church to serve God and they will be rewarded by him (Lauterbach 2013). She also outlines one of the criteria to be seen as a loyal church member that is to stay in church although the church faces challenges and by doing this one also shows to be a true faithful.⁶

So although there were attempts to systematise and regularise the forms of assistance that the churches provide it is for the most part informal and given on an ad hoc basis. This also shows how the organisation of the service provided affected the expectations people have. When services were presented and organised in a more formal way there were a different set of expectations associated, and it was more difficult for the church leaders to expect loyalty based on serving God and being a good Christian.

⁵ Interview pastor, 31 January 2012, Kampala.

⁶ A similar example was when a church member in the same church was going to Canada for resettlement. The head pastor was announcing it in church and said that it was not because of the UNHCR that she was resettled, but because of God and because she had been loyal to the church (fieldnotes, February 2013).

In addition to material assistance, the churches and pastors also provide spiritual assistance. At the spiritual level pastors assist people by offering prayers, by deliverance sessions and by anointing (with oil). This can be related to listening to their displacement experiences, counselling them on how to overcome rape of a partner and finding hope for their future lives. A number of pastors explained that when they had nothing else to offer they could always pray for people, but also that people would often get disappointed and move on to a new church.

At the same time though, pastors get rewarded for their spiritual services as an acknowledgement for a particular service and also as recognition of the spiritual strength of the pastor. One pastor explained how he through his work has healed different people and that is why they have helped him and supported him financially. He has prayed for people, healed them and now they send him money both for the church and for sending his kids to school.⁷ This return can be seen both as a way of returning something (reciprocity) and as an expression of gratitude. Another explained: “When I pray for somebody and there is a response, there are chances that I will receive money as appreciation. You pray and there is breakthrough. There is recognition that God has answered to the prayers”.⁸ At the same time some pastors are capable of discerning the spiritual gifts of other people, which can take the form of having visions about other people. This is understood as the person being a medium through which the word of God is transmitted. These spiritual gifts are also rewarded with gifts of gratitude in the form of food, money or clothes. So there are relations of exchange that involve both material assistance and more spiritually related gifts.

PROVIDING SERVICES OR GIFTS OF GRACE?

One question that prompts reflection when analysing religious institutions and their role with regard to providing services is the terminology we use as well as the emic understanding of these services. In the literature on displacement and religion (as well as on development and religion more generally) the term Faith Based

⁷ Interview, Kampala, 16 January 2012.

⁸ Interview, Kampala, 31 January 2012.

Organisation (henceforth FBO) is widely used. In my view the FBO approach to studying the role of religious institutions in development or as service providers is too narrow and technocratic. It creates an artificial boundary between the FBO and the receiver of assistance (or the NGO and the beneficiary) that tends to ignore how these constitute each other or are both influencing the processes of providing and receiving assistance. Moreover, this approach ignores the different ways in which religion and materiality are interwoven. It is not just a question of being member of a certain religious community to receive material assistance. As this paper shows, there are specific understandings of how for instance the use of spiritual talents can be paid for / acknowledged through material goods. This calls for a deeper understanding of the link between religious categories and materiality, as well as how this is employed, invoked, and unfolded in specific contexts (see also Thelen *et al* 2009).

Also, the churches see themselves as communities that are obliged to help people in need, so it is not just a role that they have taken on because the state or the international organisations do not provide assistance. It is part of their self-understanding and identity as a Christian community. What are the implications of this in terms of understanding the role of religious institutions as providers and regulators of social services? It seems to be important to distinguish between different forms of assistance, e.g. from running a project to providing small scale assistance, but also how these forms of assistance interact and how their form influence the way they are provided and regulated, e.g. according to different sets of normative frameworks.

The churches transgress the private-public divide and this dissolves conventional understandings of service provision (as something one would expect the state to provide) and gift-giving, charity etc.

Norms and regulation— non-refusal/pity and spiritual maturity/loyalty

One category of assistance is understood as being for people “in dire need” and not necessarily reserved for church members. But who are the deserving poor? Who are in dire need? According to pastors they could discern those in need by observing for

instance who would come to church without wearing shoes. Those with basic needs were talked about as being in priority and could not be refused, hence the norm about non-refusal. This was talked about as a Christian obligation and as a special obligation that in particular pastors had. When explaining this, the Bible was often referred to and it was seen as a form of Christian *grund* norm and self-understanding of being a pastor. This is seen in relation to fulfilling their pastoral obligations, but also in relation to doing the 'work of God', which implies that God also would reward them.

There is also the understanding that the church cannot refuse someone who comes to church in need of help. This is explained by being 'the words of God'; you have to help someone in need. So if a stranger comes to the church and asks for help, they seek out the possibilities, but also based on a judgement of whether the person is talking the truth.⁹ The pastor says that they only refuse in rare cases and if they do, then they refuse "*avec sagesse*". Another person explained this norm of non-refusal as being thought of as a 'postponement' of help, in case the church or the church leaders did not have the resources.

A variation of the obligation to help people in need was made explained through feeling pity for someone. One pastor for instance talked about how a lady he knew felt pity (in the sense of feeling sorrow for someone) for him and therefore helped him (*elle a eu pitié de moi*). This was a common way of explaining why unknown people (or Ugandans) would help them, both helping them coming to Kampala, but also helping them with food and for instance accepting delay in the paying of rent.

One way to distinguish was in terms of how widely and in what ways the church and church leaders needed to become involved, as this also says something about the scale and importance of the request or need. One pastor formulated it this way:

⁹ As I am dealing with the norms here it is important also to note that this is not necessarily how giving help is done in practice. People would complain about the pastors not helping them enough or it would create jealousy if one family was helped and not another. Also there was a tendency (at least in one of the churches) that the head pastor would help people he knew from his home town on an individual basis. He would pay visits at home and see if they were in need of food or money. This group of people was seen as the core and most loyal group of the church and they were also taking up the positions of responsibility in church (such as elders, cashier, deacons etc.).

“We have many cases where we handle it between the pastor and the believer [*fidèle*]. There are also cases where we call the elders and I explain the case. If there is possibility we help directly. There are also situations where we cannot limit ourselves to pastors and elders. We inform the church and we make an appeal of offering. Like if happened with the president of ‘papas’ [men’s group in church]. He was a refugee. His wife was with us. They had a child. He [the president] fell sick and was sick for three months before he died. He was at Mengo hospital [private not for profit hospital]. He didn’t get any assistance. HCR [UNHCR] didn’t pay because he had to be at Mulago [national referral hospital]. So instead of leaving him like that we did a collection in church. So we helped, first with paying for the scans. Then the days he was leaving Mengo to go to Mulago, the church collected and gave its part. And the wife also gave her part. There we informed the church directly and informed them about the situation in which the father was”¹⁰

The pastor distinguishes three different ways in which help is handled and regulated:

1. an issue that is handled between a pastor and a church member, 2. a case where the church leaders and elders are involved and 3. a case where the entire church gets involved. This depends on the size of the assistance involved, but also on how closely related the person in need is to the church. The latter category, where the church leaders mobilise a joint collection in church, is reserved for church members and leaders. The pastor referred to above legitimises the help offered to the man in hospital with him and his wife being active church members and in particular the man as being the president of the men’s group. The church had an obligation to help. So one criterion of receiving help is how closely one is connected to the church, what role one plays in church life and how the pastors judge the members’ behaviour, e.g. whether they live ‘good Christian lives’. This is also talked about as observing someone’s spiritual maturity.

Pastors who came to Kampala as refugee were assisted in a particular way and were privileged because of their status. A number of pastors I talked, who had come to Kampala recently, had been offered free accommodation. People would not accept that

¹⁰ Interview with pastor [*pasteur responsable*], 7 February 2012, Kampala

a ‘man of God’ should not live in a good house and by some it was also doing the ‘work of God’ that was seen as an unselfish act that should be recognised. At the same time though, many talked about the splitting up of churches as pastors trying to make a living by founding their won church.

RECOGNITION, AUTHORITY AND POLITICAL SUBJECTIFICATION

Through the services provided as well as the wider relations of exchange of spiritual economies the churches provide recognition to people in a double sense: both as a fellow Christian, a Congolese, and also as a refugee in the more managerial sense of the term (e.g. through creating files for church members, through presenting their cases, through representing the Congolese refugee community vis-à-vis the UNHCR). Recognising refugees as Christians or Congolese also entailed that they were offered a space to perform or show their talent, as mentioned in the case of Alice above. Recognition becomes reciprocal or is part of an engagement in social relationships based in social institutions (Fraser 2000: 114). At the same time we have seen that attempts to bureaucratised the assistance that churches offer often failed (for various reasons), but one reason being that it failed to provide a reciprocal form of recognition in the process. The act of providing assistance in the more formalised way was interpreted by people according to a different cognitive scheme as compared to the assistance provided because people were in dire need, because of Christian obligations or already existing bonds of loyalty. People distinguish between these different services, and act and identify according to the related sets of norms as well.

This observation, I would argue, questions the assertion that refugee life (and in particular refugee life in marginalised and subordinated spaces) can be seen as a form of ‘bare life’ stripped of citizenship. As Das argues “what the poor engage in are politics and not simply appeals to pity or use of traditional patron-client relations” (2011: 319). Although people refer to idioms such as ‘pity’ and ‘spiritual maturity’ (that also involves some form of loyalty) these practices can also be seen as new forms politics and the religious institutions as new arenas of governance that operate

according to other criteria and ways of regulating access than other humanitarian organisations for instance.

As mentioned above access to some of the services provided by the churches were easier and more straightforward than in other institutions. There was no need of a file or having a case number. Still, it required being seen as a good Christian in some cases and skills in terms of presenting your needs in church and being visible. On the one hand the churches duplicate the international agencies, seek to become bureaucratised in order to be part of the same game and gain more legitimacy and to tap into the realm of services and authority that entails. On the other hand though, they seek to distance themselves from the same organisations, because being too closely associated also posed a risk of losing legitimacy or credibility if the institutions fail to provide.

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